

**THE FONDA CONTAINER COMPANY
/ SOLO CUP BUILDING
ST. ALBANS, VT**

Proposed Demolition Project

**Historic Documentation Report
of
Fonda Container Company/Solo Cup
Plant Complex**

**Buildings 1, 2 & 3 of the
Fonda Container Company Site
15-21 Lower Newton Street
St. Albans, Vermont**

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Prepared by

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Project Summary

The Fonda Plant site, now owned by the City of St. Albans, has three extant buildings: #s 1, 2 & 3 dating from 1942, 1953, and 1957 respectively. All of them will be documented in this project prior to demolition necessitated by condition and hazardous substance contamination. The estimated square footage of the buildings is 120,000 square feet. The City of St. Albans currently owns the rectangular, 4.5 acre parcel which is located in a mixed commercial / residential neighborhood one block from North Main Street and downtown St. Albans. Railroad siding parallels the site along the western boundary. The building is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as an important example of a factory with a distinctive saw tooth roof and for its contributions to the industrial history of Vermont.

With assistance from the Northwest Regional Planning Commission's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Assessment funding, it was determined that all buildings contained some level of hazardous materials contamination resulting from chemicals used in the paper product manufacturing process. The City of Saint Albans applied for and received grant funds from the Environmental Protection Agency to remediate hazardous materials at the site. The City of St. Albans plans to remediate and demolish Buildings #1, #2, and #3 and related structures in preparation for site redevelopment. The Division for Historic Preservation (DHP) has been consulted throughout this process and has agreed with the City's assessment that the demolition is necessary but will result in an unavoidable adverse effect on the historic property. Therefore, because of their historic significance, per a letter dated March 5, 2009 from Nancy Boone, Acting State Historic Preservation Officer at the time, the City must provide appropriate photographic documentation of the entire complex in order to demolish all three buildings.

In 2008, the project had been awarded funding in part by the Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP). A Section 106 Historic Preservation Report was prepared by consultant Liz Pritchett in February of 2008 for the site when an earlier re-development project was planned that would have rehabilitated the main plant building. Since then the discovery of hazardous substance contamination has led to the revised plan to demolish all structures as they cannot feasibly be rehabilitated with the cost of the required remediation.

The VCDP and DHP have entered into a Programmatic Agreement for Section 106 review for all VCDP undertakings. The adverse effect of the demolition will be addressed by a Standard Mitigation Measure of photographic documentation done in accordance with the "Vermont Division for Historic Preservation Photographic Documentation Requirements for Historic Structures." This documentation report is prepared to satisfy that measure and provide the photographic documentation prior to demolition.

From the Pritchett report of February 2008:

"The long, narrow Fonda building is comprised of three attached buildings or sections totaling more than 120,000 square feet. Building 1 was built in 1942, Building 2 in 1953, and Building 3 in 1957. ... the original front building (Building 1) ... contains a significant one-story, sawtooth roof industrial space that is set behind a two-story front block with generally intact office areas."

"Architectural Description

Building 1, 1942

The simple, flat roof, rectangular forms of this original portion of the Fonda factory and its conscious lack of ornamentation define the utilitarian structure as a vernacular example of the International Style of architecture in Vermont. Building 1 is a wood and steel frame structure comprised of over 43,000 square feet of commercial space. It has a flat roof, two-story front block with a covered loading dock at the southwest corner, and a large, one-story

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open work area to the rear with a sawtooth roof that is flanked on the west by a long storage shed, and on the east by a flat roof appendage that parallels the length of the central sawtooth section. The building has clapboard siding and reeded corner pilasters that are covered with aluminum on the front block, six-over-six windows that appear original, and some modern replacement one-over-one windows. The front entry has a c. 1970s aluminum double door and transom, a simple gable roof one-bay porch, and a handicap ramp that extends from the east side of the porch. The regularly spaced, one-over-one windows in the sawtooth roof appear to be modern replacements, as similar roofs of this type and age generally have continuous bands of wood or steel windows that span the length of each sawtooth section. On the rear block, roof parapets on the west and east elevations obscure exterior views of the sawtooth roof form. Various types of historic garage and pedestrian doors are located on the east elevation. Significant interior features in the front office block include natural finish stair balustrades, molded window and door trim, and a generally intact, historic floor plan.

Building 2, 1953

This one-story, rectangular section that extends from the north end of Building 1 and joins with Building 3, is a steel and concrete block, flat roof structure that is slightly higher than both Buildings 1 and 3. It has two small appendages that project from the east elevation and tall bands of steel windows at the northeast corner set high on the wall plane. Loading doors are located on the west elevation adjacent to the railroad tracks. This vacant, utilitarian building is not highly significant or unusual.

Building 3, 1957

Building 3 is similar to Building 2 with its steel and concrete block construction. It has various loading doors on all elevations and a wide open interior. This vacant, utilitarian building is not highly significant or unusual.

Boiler House, c. 1955

This small, concrete block, flat roof boiler house is built into the bank on the east side of the property. A narrow overhead connector between the boiler house and Building 1 provided power to the factory. The building is no longer in use and does not appear highly significant.

Storage Shed, c. 1950

The small, wood frame, novelty sided, gable roof shed at the northeast corner of the site, is vacant. Doors and windows are missing. The building is no longer used and is not highly significant.

Statement of Significance

The Fonda Container Company was a welcome industry in the 1930s when St. Albans was suffering from its fading railroad activity, with lay-offs, strikes, and a diminished need for rail service due to increased automobile and truck transportation nationwide. The selected site on Lower Newton Street was only eight miles from the supplier of paperboard in Sheldon. The Missisquoi Corporation in Sheldon had assumed part ownership of Fonda when difficulties developed in 1930. These two companies became Standard Packaging Corporation in 1952 and in 1970 merged with Saxon Industries, the largest paper jobbers in the world. In earlier times Fonda was often referred to as “the box factory”, but it did not make “boxes” as such. Cylindrical paper cans, food pails, paper trays, and paper plates were all made in St. Albans. The successful development by Fonda engineers of the processes to print and plastic-coat paper plates provided a great impetus. Production and storage space in the St. Albans plant increased six-fold in twenty years. In June 1971 twelve million, one hundred thousand plates were produced in one day. The company recycled its waste since 1943. Forty employees in 1940 had become more than 400 by 1972; and the payroll was more than two and a half million dollars.¹

On November 1, 2005 the Solo Cup Company closed the Fonda plant in St. Albans, displacing all 168 employees.² It was among the oldest continuously run commercial operations in the city.³ On September 10, 2007 the City of St. Albans purchased the plant from the Solo Cup Operating Corporation for \$300,000.

¹ St. Albans, Vermont, Through the Years 1763-1963, 1977.

² St. Albans Messenger, 5/16/2005, “PBM in Georgia to stay”

³ Ibid, 8/13/2007. “City poised to purchase Fonda Plant”

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Site History

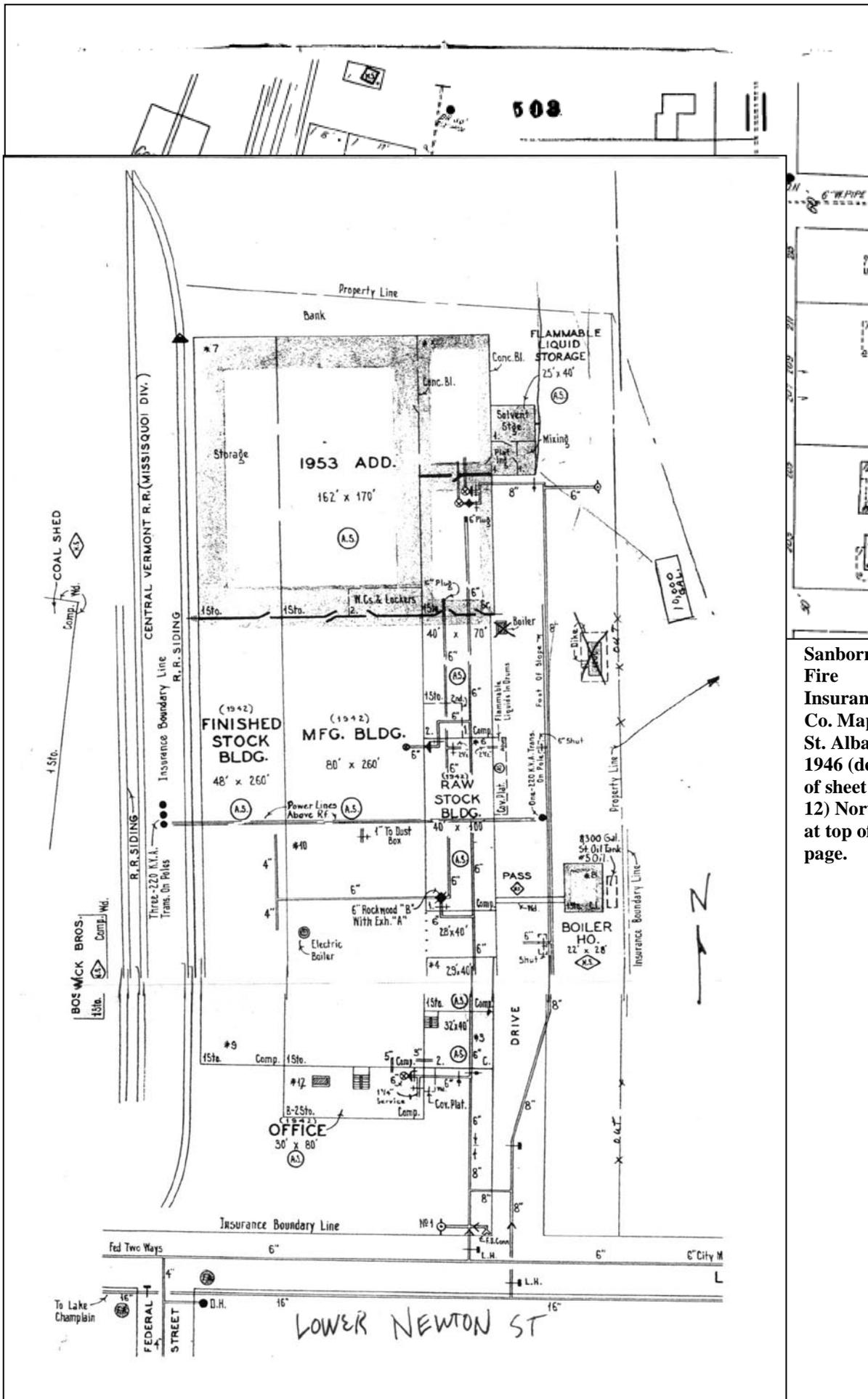
According to historic maps, the site of the Fonda building was vacant during the 19th century when for a time it was owned by W. O. Gadcomb. The Beers Map of 1871 indicates that Gadcomb owned numerous undeveloped parcels west of Main Street. Sanborn Insurance Maps tell us that the site remained vacant until around 1920 when a small house and two small barns were built. These structures were removed when the Fonda Container Company, Inc. built its factory (Building 1) in 1942.

According to records in the St. Albans City Clerk's office, on March 21, 1942 the Fonda Container Company, Inc., a New York corporation with its principal place of business at Utica, New York, purchased a parcel from C. H. Morton of St. Albans. The parcel is described as "a certain lot of land together with the buildings thereon located at the northerly side of Lower Newton Street....known as the Morton lot". The city agreed to remove or relocate a sewer so that it "will not interfere with the construction and use of a building to be constructed by the grantee herein."⁴

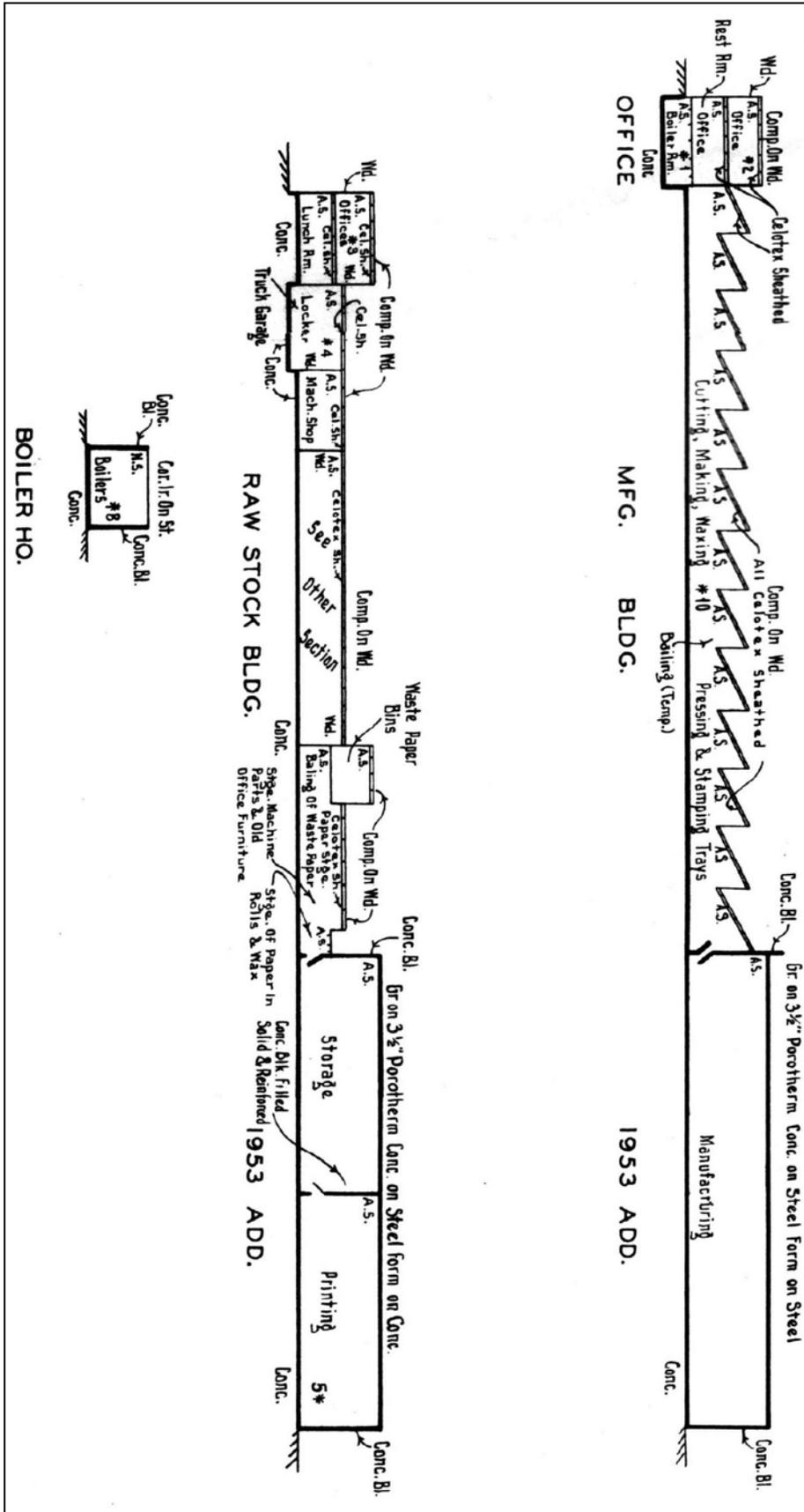
Historic Maps

⁴ City Clerk's Office, V7, pp. 294-295.

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Sanborn
 Fire
 Insurance
 Co. Map of
 St. Albans,
 1946 (detail
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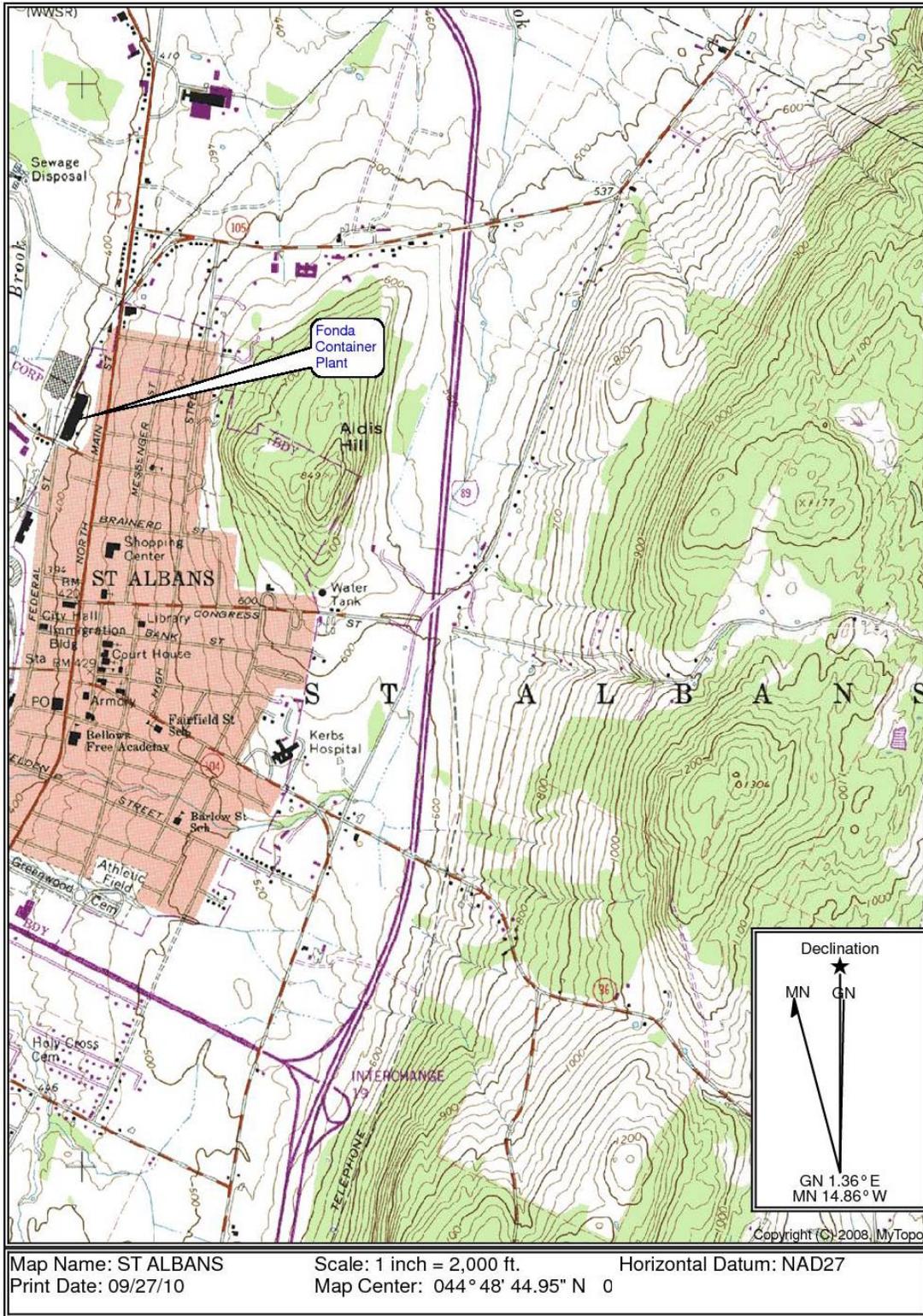


Annotated
 1954 Factory Insurance
 Assoc. Site plan

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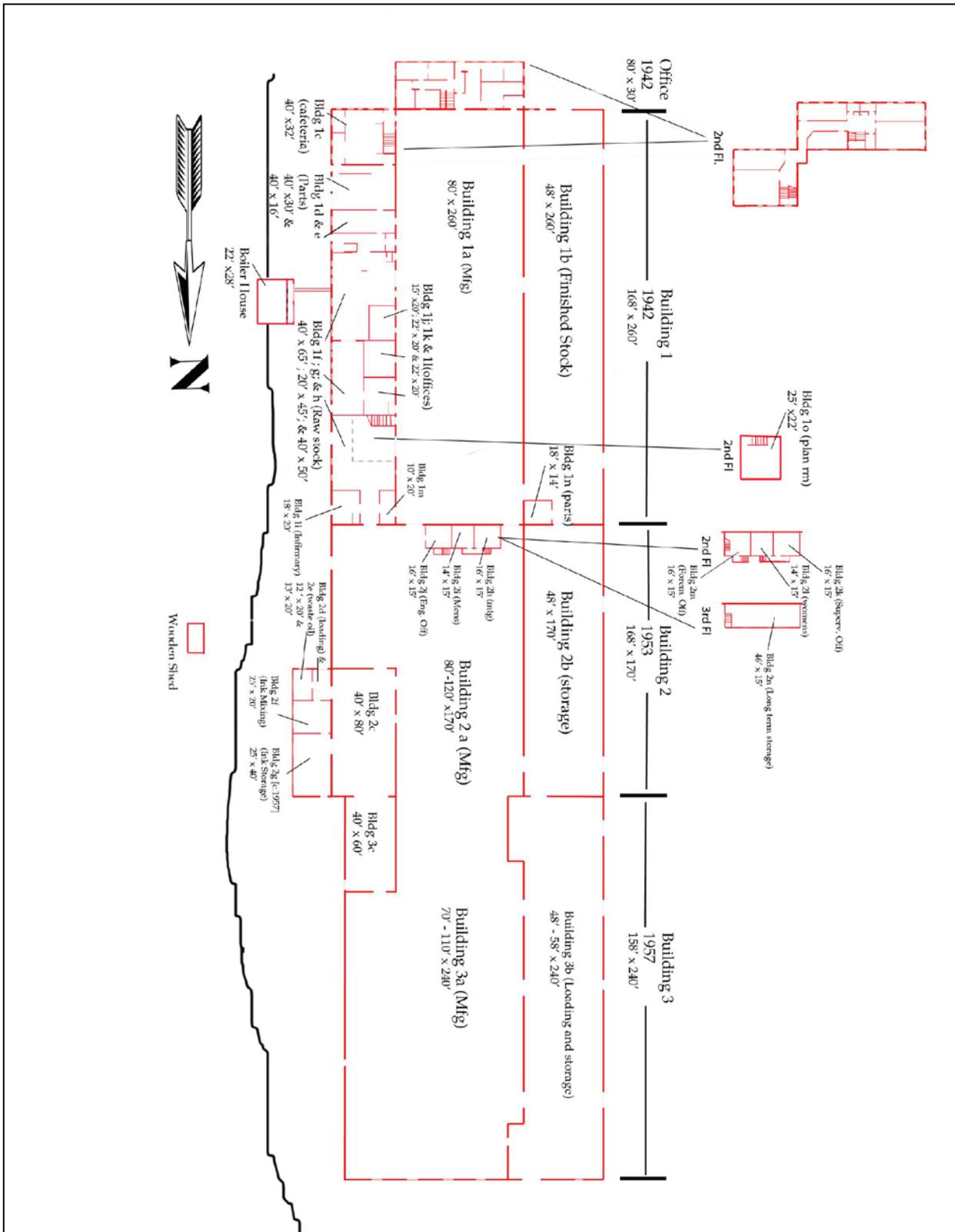
**Section details from
1954 Factory Insurance Assoc. Site plan**

Location Map

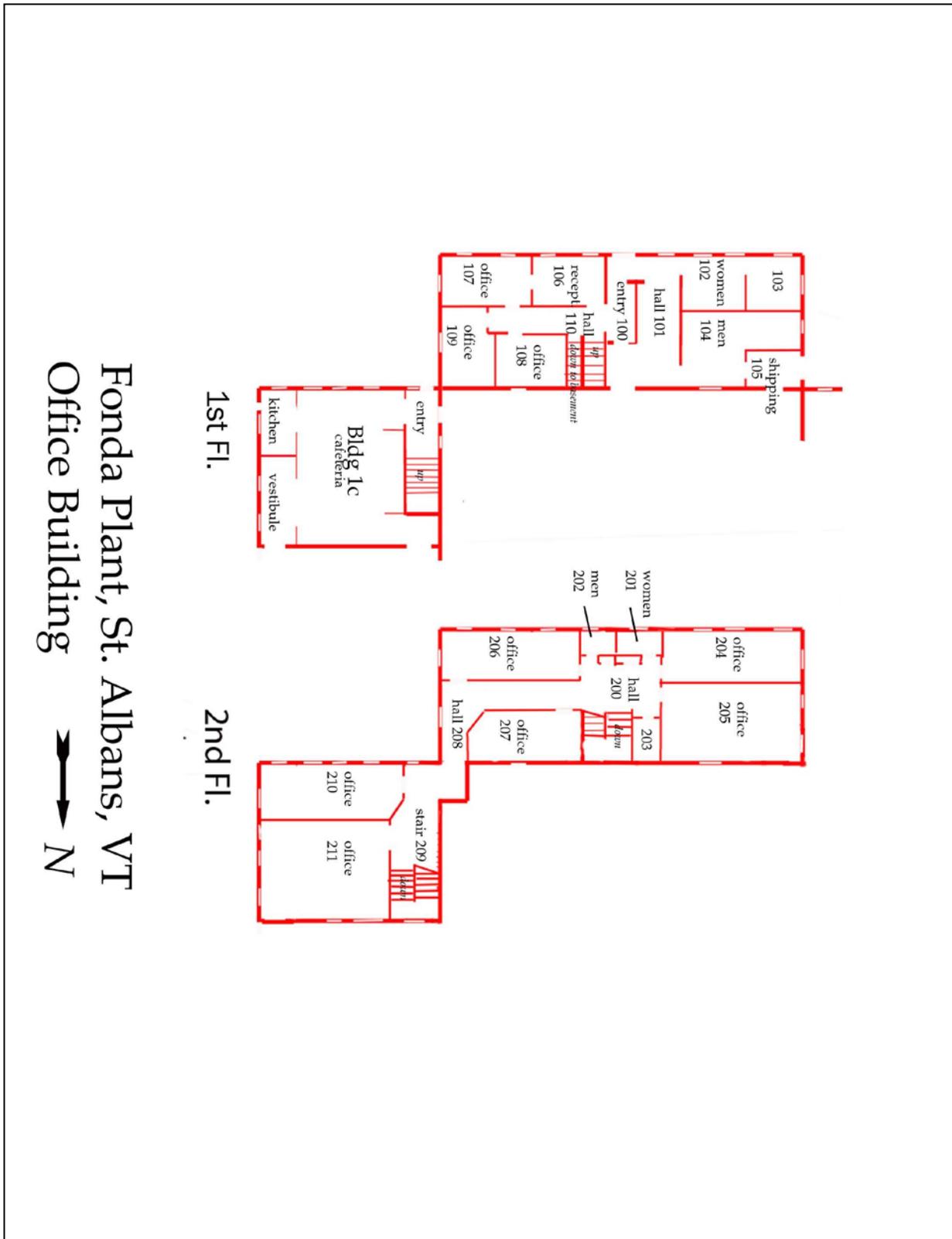


Annotated detail of U.S.G.S. "St. Albans Quadrangle.

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Site & Floor Plan (roughly to scale based on plans and maps) by L. Papazian, 2010



Office Building Floor Plan (roughly to scale based on plans and maps) by L. Papazian, 2010

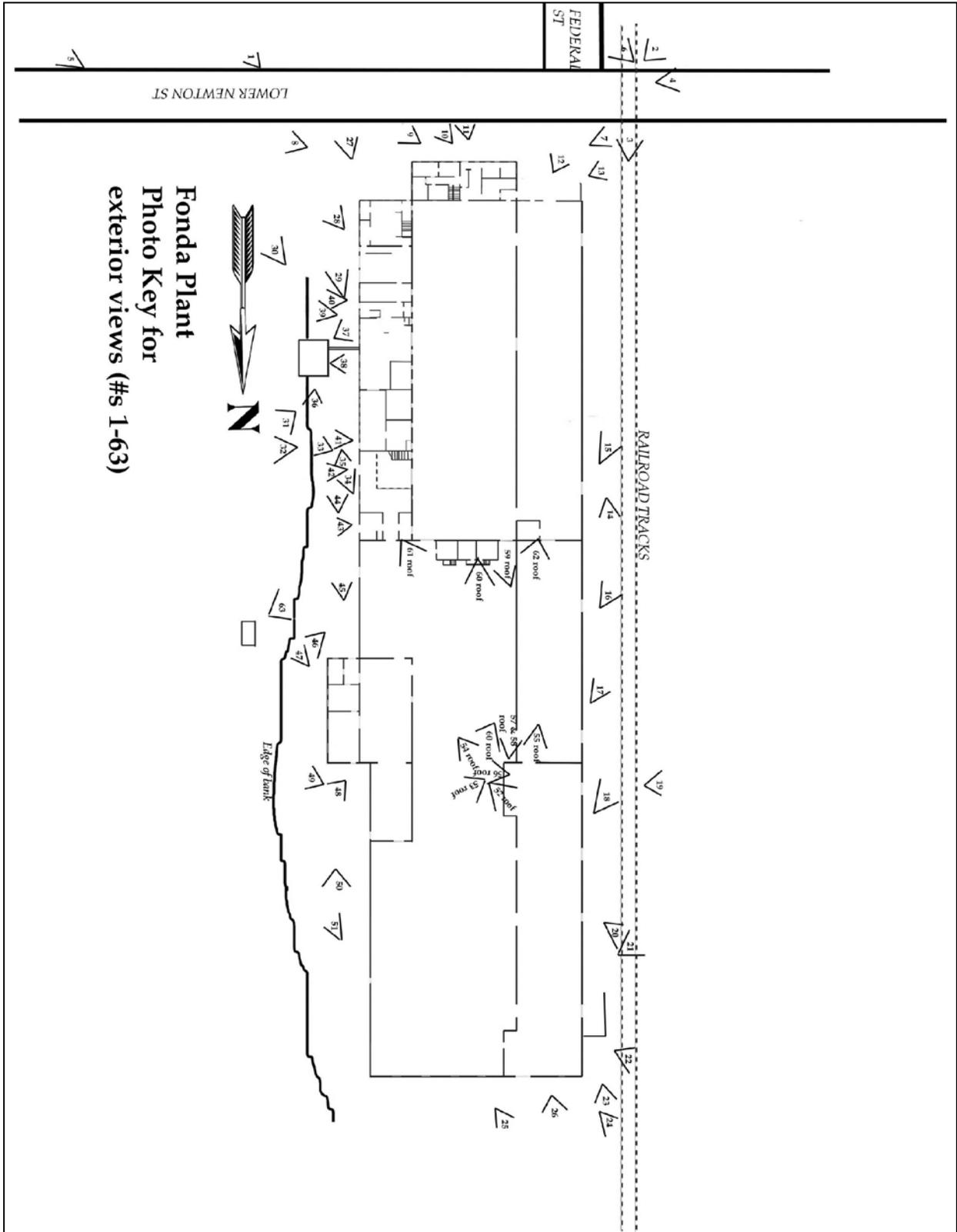


Photo key for Exterior Photographs (See larger print included with photograph prints)

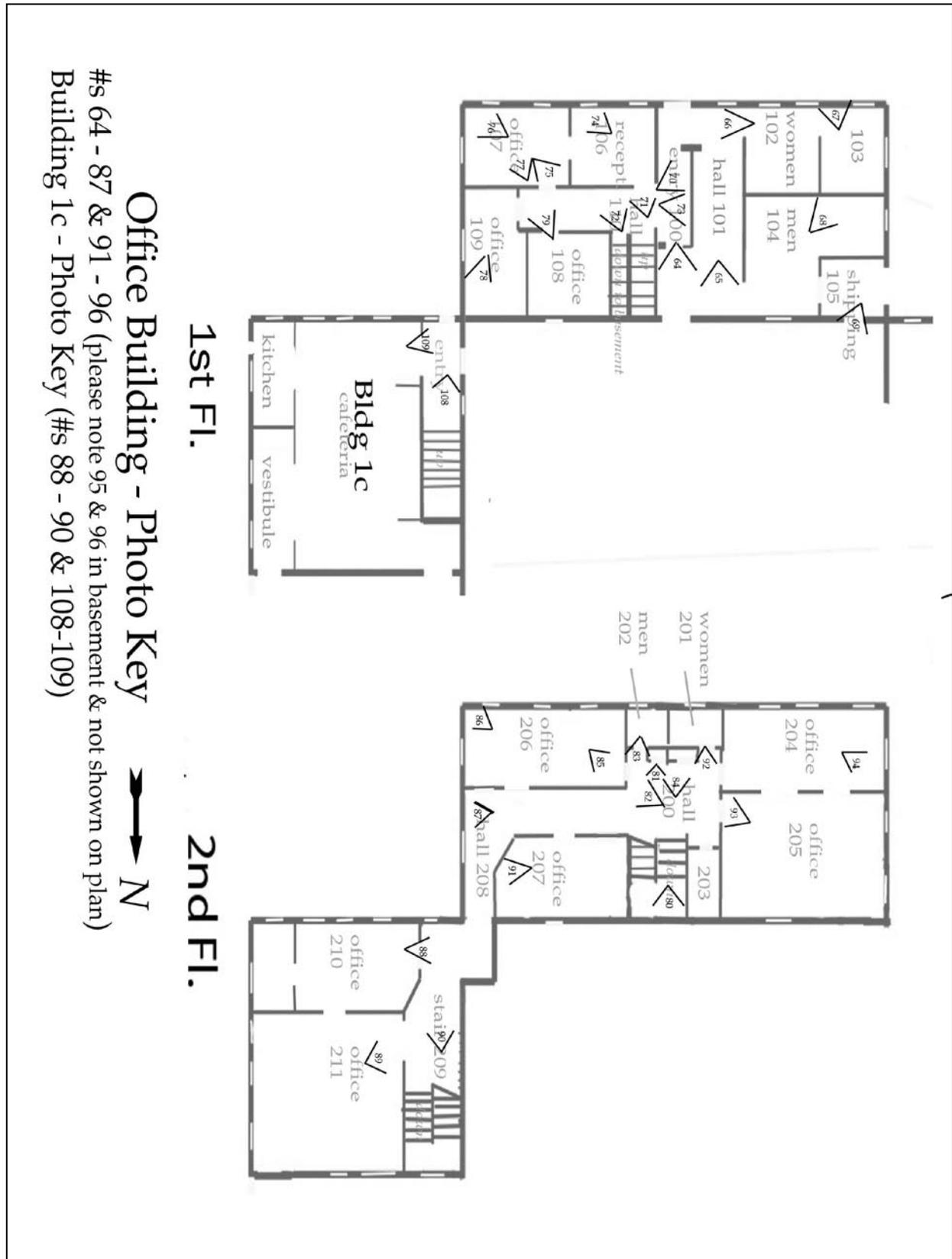


Photo key for Office Building Photographs

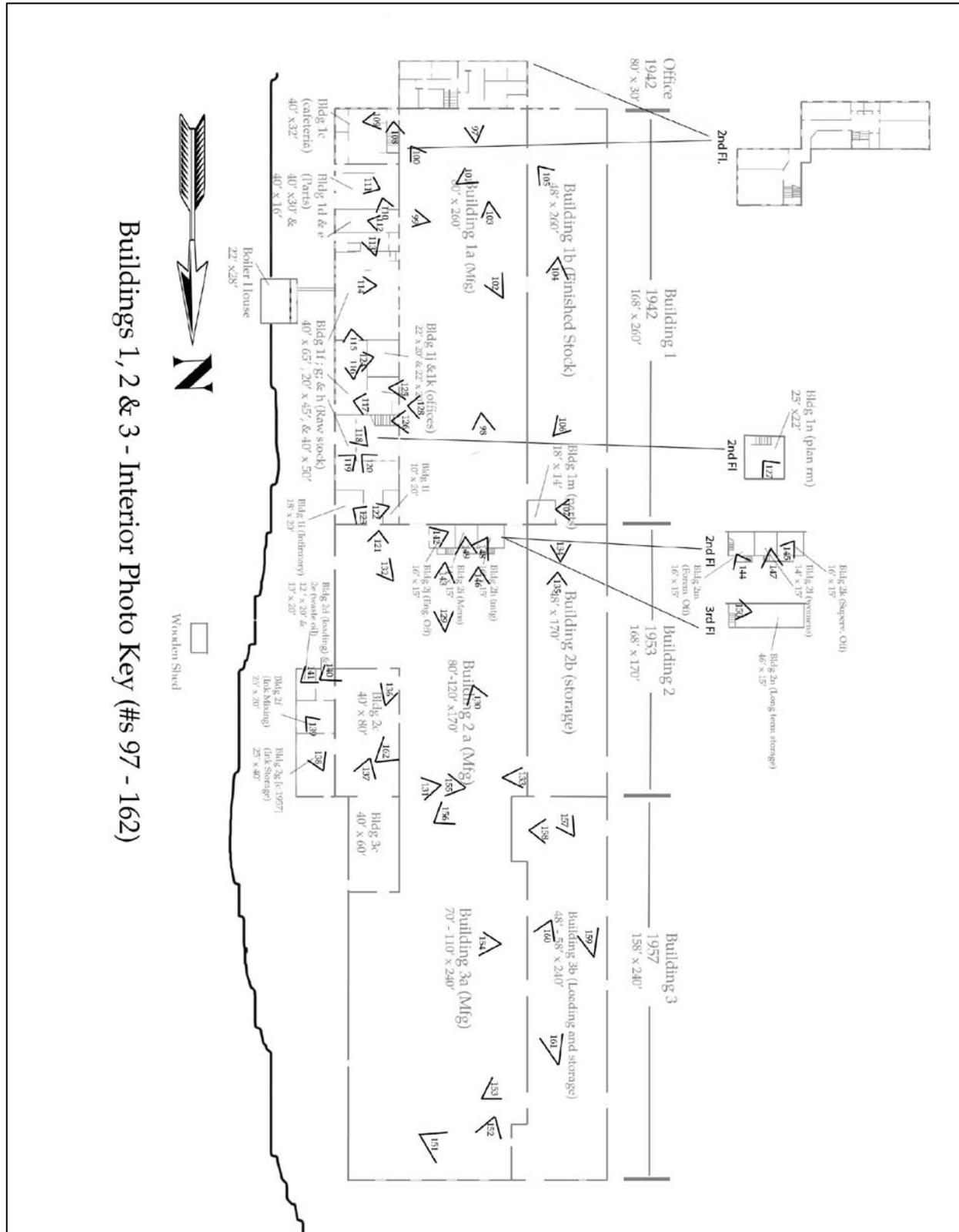


Photo key for Interior Photographs of plant Buildings 1, 2, & 3 (See larger print included with photograph prints)

Photograph Index

The following is the same for all photographs:

**Fonda Container Co. Plant, 15-21 Lower Newton Street, St. Albans, Vermont
8/31/2010, by L. Papazian**

Description of views

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17	Plant Bldg 2, west façade	Looking northeast
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Bibliography

Division for Historic Preservation. Letter from Nancy Boone to Jane Kiser, St. Albans Community Development regarding Fonda Container Co./Solo Cup Building, St. Albans, VT/EPA, dated March 5, 2009.

Factory Insurance Assoc., Fonda Container Co., Inc. Site plans from 1948 & 1954

Pritchett, Liz. "Section 106 Review: VCDP Funds for The Finds Container Co./ Solo Cup Building, St. Albans, VT," letter addressed to Brad Dousevich, dated February 25, 2008

Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, for St. Albans, Vermont, for the year 1946 & 1954.

Sprinkler Diagram plan done for Fonda Container Co. from 1992 (courtesy City of St. Albans)